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Nature and Form of Dialogue in Sikhism

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PREFACE

This, Dr. Ganda Singh Memorial lecture delivered on 18-11-95 by Dr. Jodh Singh, Professor and Head of Department of Religious Studies and Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Religious Studies, Punjabi University, Patiala. Dr. Jodh Singh is a well known author and speaker. He has number of Books to his credit in addition to articles, which appear in prestigious Magazines and newspapers not only in India but also abroad. Dr. Jodh Singh was awarded Akali Phula Singh Award by Akali Phula Singh Trust for the year 199 . As usual these lectures are published as tracks by Guru Nanak Dev Mission, Patiala. Guru Nanak Dev Mission feels great pleasure in publishing the same. The Mission and the Trust are grateful to Dr. Jodh Singh for delivering this lecture.

Nature and Form of Dialogue in Sikhism

When one thinks about the capacity of Sikhism as a developing and all comprehending religion, the lay out of such an expansive sacred tank of spirituality is visualised which in the antiquity was an unknown and unused well. But the Gurus and the other elevated souls on account of their hard endeavours, deep thinking and overwhelming love brought the sacred water of the well out in order to spread it far and wide. And undoubtedly the life saving water proved to be efficacious to the divided and down trodden masses and the thoughts of humanitarianism not only developed but got firmly established in the form of Sikhism. The Sikhs of the Guru were urged to convert that water into clouds so that the world could enjoy the showers of love and the Sikh spirit—the spirit of *bisari gai sab tat prai*, the spirit of *lare din ke her* and the spirit of *dehura masit soi puja au Nivaj oi*. Sikh concepts, the hard earned values propagated by the Gurus were to be put forth by the Sikhs, as the rocklike base of bringing about the peace and loving environment all around; but unfortunately this could not be so because since long the parasitical creeper of ego has started sustaining in the individual character by suckling and finishing the life-elixir in man called Sikh, making him hollow; elections have replaced selections, and possession or seizure has displaced service (*seva*), the sacred tank of Sikh spirit started shrinking. And today it is inclined to be made the same deep well which contains the buckets in its persian wheel, the bullock-drivers seat called *gadhi*, the religious and political oxen rotating the persian wheel day and night but unfortunately some of the leaders taking away

the conduit (*parcha*) of the Persian wheel are fisticuffing with their full might. They are busy in converting the sacred water of the tank into a marsh and water of the sacred well is pouring into the well again and again. This is perhaps not incorrect and in expedient also in the modern context. Why should the leaders endure the suffering of first conserving and then giving the right direction to the water when in fact the rotation of the well-water back into the well itself is not only giving the label of the service of the community (*panthic seva*) but the financial gains too. The end result could be catastrophic. The stagnation of the water is putting a question mark on its sanctity and the holocausts perpetrated upon the community in the eighties have accelerated the process of converting of Sikh sacred water into a stagnant pool. Needless to say that where as the state and central government machinery was fully geared up for this purpose, many a religious and political leaders of the Sikhs also not lagged behind in this *panthic seva*.

The statements sound hollow and unwise that governments are not allowing the Sikhs to put their heads together to ponder over their serious problems. The question is, when the fight of the Sikhs is against the government why should they look upon the government to first gather the Sikhs, make available the fighting material to them so that they form their government to come to blows with each other. The fresh precedent is before us wherein we see that Bhai Ashok Singh Bagrian under the guidance andegis of the Akal Takhat Jathedar, Bhai Manjit Singh compelled all the Sikh leaders to gather and form one Sikh party for solving the problems of the community. Where was the government involved in it? Going on making government the scapegoat for our own follies sounds similar to the central governments of both the countries, India and Pakistan blaming each other for their any internal economic, political or religious ills for which their own policies governed by narrow vested interests are responsible. The basic doctrine of Sikhism (and not the different instructions of the different monastical *deras*) are definitely capable of taking into

their embrace one and all and are sufficiently competent to providing a consciousness and guidance for any religious, social or political movement. Then in spite of many centenary, quincenary, or three hundredth celebrations why a sort of stagnation in the doctrine and praxis could not be got cleared, there dynamism notwithstanding. Why a Sikh is feeling alien in India and why being the most self abnegating for any cause of Indian sub-continent, he has all of a sudden been started considered as the most suspicious person at large.

Ego, degradation in character, craving for riches, unemployment etc may be the intrinsic reasons for this all, but two reasons I feel are obvious. Firstly we almost all have snapped our links with the Guru Granth Sahib, the main fountainhead of Sikhism. Those who claim to have not done so also feel contented by simply reciting the hymns in the morning and in the evening. Nobody has the leisure for the study, rethinking and analysing the hymns of the great Granth. From this very reason emerges the second valid point of total absence of dialogue for which the lives and hymns of the Gurus are beacon light for the whole humanity. The present age is the age of dialogue and in the political spheres also the dialogue is the basis for all the treaties among the countries. The whole Arab world has kept itself engaged in war for many decades against Israel, but what could not be achieved through physical struggle is likely to be gained through dialogue and both the parties are playing positive role in this direction. In India, the results of the fundamentalism inspired by the majority communities against the minority communities have been well understood and analysed even by the religion based party, the BJP. Its wise leaders understanding the wrong direction they had been pursuing have started making headlines in the news papers where they are promising to look into the interests of all people alike. They have started dialogue with different religious, ethnic and social groups and by clearing the misunderstandings for the time being atleast, the new alliances are coming up. Some Sikh leaders after suffering a lot are thinking in this direction but mostly in the Sikh assemblies instead of dialogue, challenging shouts are heard with

the results that in Indian perspective the most enduring truth prone and die hard Sikh community is not finding any common goal and though apparently looking alike is still having the vested, narrow, regional, tribal and minor interests at the forefront. When internal dialogues have become impossible how could anybody think of the dialogue with other communities or parties. Dialogue is only possible when the storehouse of the knowledge emanated from considered thought is there with and it is not inclined to make the other party fall flat; rather it should have the urge of saying, listening to and understanding a view point put forth :

*'Jab lagi dunia rahle Nanak kichhu suniai kichhu kahiai'*¹

Whose mind is all dark, they do not stand true to their words. Their heart lotus is in verse and does not bloom; Therefore, their high verbosity notwithstanding, they in fact exhibit their inner ugliness. But those are accomplished persons, who are of dialogical nature, and have the humble competence of saying something as well as of understanding a view point in its proper context. Guru Nanak hails such persons by saying them the competent persons (*sugharh*)

*manhu ji andhe ghup kahia biradu na janani
mani andhai undhai kaval diseni khare karup
iki kahi jcnani kahia bujhani te nar sugharh serup*²

According to Gurbani and Sikhism the *sambad* or dialogue is the whole process of knowing, saying and understanding. In Sikhism the base of a worthy life is the doctrine that one should have partnership with the virtues of the people and should keep away from the mischiefs of others *sanjh karij i gunah keri chhodi avagan chaliai*³ Sikh gives no recognition to life lived in monasteries or jungles, it rather approves that life which prepares the individual to be of the world while not becoming worldly. Sikh life is the life of responsibility towards the surrounding and therefore its spirituality and spiritual dialogue have some distinction with other ways of life. Sikh religion gives due importance to man as an individual but it does not allow the interests of the society to be sacrificed for the sake of one man whosoever he may

be. It approves humanitarianism but not humanism of the West because humanism can flourish only in the autocracy, apostasy and narrowness of heart and mind. The dialogue with others in view of conquering one and all absolutely does not fit in the thought frame of Gurbani. Guru Nanak being fully conscious of the egotist personality likely to emerge from debating behaviour pattern of the society, says, that the researcher flourishes whereas the debater perishes *khoji upajet badi binasai hau bali bali gur kartara* ⁴ Debate creates suicidal ego called the chronic ailment (*diraghroga*) in Gurbani. Only *seva* or the 'service' can help get rid of this malady and the service alone can fill one's heart with love. Guru Amar Das furthers the view of Guru Nanak by saying *badi bins: hi sevak sevhai gur kai hetu piari*,⁵ the debater perishes and the humble servant of the Guru serves with love and devotion.

In *Bachitra Natak*, Guru Gobind Singh has written about Ram's sons Lava and Kusha whose descendants for generations indulged in schisms with each other and by getting into active battles of egoism got divided in many factions ultimately of which the Sodhis and Bedis emerged. Upto fifteenth century the Bedis could retain only twenty villages though they are said to be *chakravarti* kings of ancient times. Conflicts create polemics and without the true Name, one is decayed in doubts. Namdev also holds that if somebody is desirous of enjoying the *Ram-rasayan*, he should never indulge in polemics *bad bibad kahu sio na kijai, rasana ram rasayan pijai* ⁶

To save the self from polemical and disputational egotist mentality the Sikh religion and the Gurbani talk of a meaningful factual and self analysing dialogue. Indeed, the Gurbani clearly denotes two types of dialogue. The first form of the dialogue is the dialogue with the self, the self appraisal or peeping into the self. Before the external dialogue the Gurbani inspires first to look into one's own heart and mind. Getting face to face one's own self one comes to know about his or her own meanness, shallowness, the layers of self interests, greeds and diplomacies. So long we do not cleanse out the dirt of above named propensities with the broom of knowledge emanated from considered thou-

ght we cannot become pure and unpolluted and our external dialogue cannot be meaningful. Guru Arjan Dev finally deduced on the penultimate page of the Guru Granth Sahib that in this great salver three things namely *sat* (truth), *santokh* (contentment) and *vichar* (thoughtfulness) have been placed and of course these three are based on the ambrosial Name of the Lord. In the Gurbani the first requisite of the truthfulness has also been mentioned by saying that the truth ought to reside in the heart and while sitting in the company of the wise instead of calculations-based ego inflation and disputations, the right and the wrong should be pondered over, Says Guru Angad

*Sati pahari satu bhala bahiai parhia pusi
Othai p pn punnu bichariai kurhai ghatai rasi
Othai khote sai- hi khare kichahi sabasi
Bolau f. dalu Nanuka dukhu sukhu khasamai pasi?*

Self analysis brings the stage of auto suggestion. For auto suggestions one need not go to search any guru in person. The basic truths of the life are so simple, straight and less in number that every individual can distinguish them in his own self. The world is not stable, everything is in a flux which is always in a forward motion. Then why this fat ego? The realisation that how much this ego has made me hollow and how much suffering I myself have created can be attained only by having dialogue with one's own self. Such a person understands that he while not becoming obstruction in the deeds being performed around in the will of God should allow the flow of the divine will through his body unhindered and should be always active for the victory of the Wondrous Lord (*Vahiguru*). The service to humanity should be considered service to the Lord and thus spiritual happiness should be cultivated.

The self analysing person becomes impatient for the glimpse of the divinity of the soul. He does not hesitate to ask himself as to what he should offer to see the light of truth equivalent to the light of myriad of suns or in the religious language the court of the truth (*sacha darbar*). For dialogue, what type of language should he use so that the court of the truth fills with love for him.

To accept the greatness cognitive truth at the appropriate time (*anritvel*) and to live the life according to that truth is the answer emerged from inside the questions for which no external polemic is needed :

*pheri ki cgoi rakhiai jitu disci darbaru
mu'au ki bolani boliai jitu sanni dhare piaru
Anrit vefa sachu nau vadiai vicharu*⁸

The person capable of initiating dialogue with his own self can control the horse-race of the mind with full confidence. He, with the help of auto-suggestions to the mind time and again, can make it realise its divine roots : *manu tu joti sarup hai apana mulu pachh. nu. man hari ji terai nali hai gurmati rang manu*⁹ *Ore manu meria tu thir rahu chot na khavahi remu*¹⁰

But from the points alluded to above this hypothesis would be wrong that the mind is quite simple and is always eager to attain divinity and could be brought to the right track easily. In the Guru Granth Sahib Kabir is fully conscious of this fact when he says that mind knows everything but still it undertakes to doing evil. How it is all well that it is having lamp in its hand and is still falling into the well *Kabir manu j nai sabh bat janat he auguna karai. Kahe ki kuslat h thi dip kue parai*.¹¹ But even then giving good suggestions to mind can not be stopped similarly as the tillage of the land cannot be abodened because the animals would destroy it, or because of the fear of theft we cannot repudiate the purchase of the household. Guru Amar Das in his longer hymn *Anandu* goes on to suggesting the mind by saying *e man meria tu sad r hi hari nale. Hari nali rahu tu manu mere dukh sabhi visarana*¹² O my mind ! be always with the Lord. O mind be with the Lord and your all the sufferings will be no more.

The man who ponders over the greatness of God by himself becoming broadminded, the man who inspires the mind towards understanding its true form enjoys the virtues of one and all. Such a person wears the silken clothing of pure life, becomes partner in the virtuous enterprises, neither memorises the mischief of others nor reminds others their evils. Wherever he goes or joins a

a discourse he initiates the welfare of others and joyfully tries to understand the crux of the problems raised. The qualities alluded to above belong to a dialogical personality hinted at in Raga Suhi hymns by Guru Nanak :

*Guna ka hovai vasula kadhhi vasu laijai
je guna hovani s jana mili sajh karijai
sajh karijai gunch kerī chhōdi avagan chaliai
pahire patambar kari adambar apana pirhu maliai
jithai jae bahiai bhalu kahiai jholi amritu pijai
guna ka hovai vasula kadhhi vasu laijai¹³*

The second type of dialogue delineated in Gurbani is the external dialogue which one finds scattered in the whole of the Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Nanak knew it very well that the work of reclamation of the withered soul of mankind could not be done without undertaking the device of dialogue. The main objective of his four itineraries was dialogue with the so-called upper and low strata of the society, the religious pundits and the laity. While understanding their mental agony he was to find solutions of their problems. In the *salokas* of Kabir recorded in the Guru Granth Sahib, the dialogue loaded with social responsibility and spirituality between saint Namdev and Trilochan is there wherein *bhagat* Trilochan asks Namdev why he is always busy in printing the cloth and thus by getting deeply involved with mammon has forgotten the name of Ram. Bhagat Namdev replies : O Trilochan ! On lips one should have the name of Ram; with hands one should go on earning his bread and butter, but the heart should remain deeply imbued in the Lord :

*Nama meia mohia kahai Tilochanu mit
kahe chhipahu chhailai Ram na lavahu chitu
Narna kahai Tilochana mukh te Ramu samali
hath pau kari kamu sabh chitu Niranjan nali¹⁴*

The first *Var* by Bhai Gurdas puts forth the scene of the dialogue between Guru Nanak and different yogis. In this dialogue the Guru generally maintains his calm and most humbly states to the Yogis that he has no miracle with him except the true Name of the Lord. But irritated yogi Bhangarnath under the guise of

dialogue sarcastically remarks that O ! Nanak, why you have forsaken the garb of yogis and have put on the clothes of the householders. By repudiating the guise of the yoga indeed, you similar to mixing of vinegar with the milk and spoiling it have spoiled the pure yogic life. Guru Nanak understanding his arrogance and sarcasm, in view of putting a small check on his inflated ego, replies in the same vein

Says Nanak, "O ! Bhangarnath your mother (teacher) knows nothing

You do not know how the vessel should be cleansed and hence the odour destroys the fruit therein.

You having repudiated household life still go to the householders for begging.

But mind it you will get nothing without putting in something (in the form of labour). (1.40)

The hagiographical literature pertaining to Guru Nanak, and his hymns in the Guru Granth Sahib make it explicit that the Guru was in continuous discussion with the pedantic *pundits* the *maulvis*, the yogis and a host of *pirs* and *faqirs*. While answering an anonymous *brahmin* who asked Guru Nanak that apparently the Guru looked like a *sadhu* but had neither the *saligram* nor the rosary of *tulasi* beads, the Guru though replied that one person particularly but his answer fits on one and all. Says the Guru, "Brahmin ! the *saligram* stone do you worship as Lord and wearing rosary of myrobalam beads as good actions. Better equip your ship of repetition of the Name Divine and pray to the gracious Lord for grace. Why water alkaline soil and waste your life ? This mud-wall shall crumble-why apply mortar to it."¹⁵

In Gurbani the best example of the external dialogue is Guru Nanak's longer hymn *Sidh Gosti* in which through a spiritual dialogue the philosophy of yoga vis-a-vis Sikh Philosophy of life has been elucidated. What type of mental balance and stability of mind is required to be held by the discussants, the Guru himself becomes the best example of the same. At the very outset of the hymn the question answers are put to each other. Yogi Charpat

asks O Nanak ! The world is unfathomable expansive sea; give your considered opinion as to how one can get across it. The answer by Guru Nanak full of courtesy, self confidence and truth, illustrates the nature, form and tradition of dialogue in Sikhism. Guru Nanak says that O Yogi ! you very well understand the crux of the question you expect me to reply. What answer I can put forth. I sincerely hold that you have already swum (this world ocean) and how could I find fault in your way and process. Of course, you have asked me my way to which I will definitely come. As the lotus, though living in water does not allow the water to wet its petals and the water fowl also keeps its wings unwet, likewise by merging *surati* into *sabad* the world ocean may be got acrossed

*Dunia sagaru dutaru kahiai kiu kori paiai paro
Charpatu bolai audhu Nanak dehu sachu bicharo
Ape akhi a pe sam j i tisu kia utaru dijai
Sachu kahahu tum pargrami tujh kia baisanu dijai
Jaise jal mahi kemal niralam murgai naisane
Surati sabadi bhav sagaru tarijai Nanak namu vakhane*

This constructive aspect of dialogue which without hurting anybody is the basis of dialogue in Sikhism. Unfortunately, incapacitates the person for explaining his view-point we all have discarded such attitude and the results are obvious. The Sikh community is divided and almost everybody is playing on his own tambourine. In the *Sikh Gosti* whether the questions are related to the individual or the common man, whether they are philosophical or ethical, the level of the dialogue is full of serenity, sobriety and mutual respect. In seventeenth and eighteenth stanza the Siddhas inquire of the Guru as to what is reason of abandoning the household and why you have put on the garb of a yogi. The answer is not only sincere and respectful but can did too *Gurmukhi khojat bhae udasi, Darsasn kai tai bhekh nivasi* i.e. in the search of Guru-oriented persons right from earth to sky have been discussed but no where the bitterness comes to the forefront. The reason for such a phenomena is that persons involved in the dialogue have neither greeds of the chairs, nor they are internally

hollow. They are the contented personalities of their respective ways of life. In the words of Bhai Gurdas in his first *var* Guru Nanak considers the Siddhas much more full of will power and capacity and perhaps that is why the Guru is said to have told them that if the Siddhas like you people would remain hidden in the caves of the mountain then who would lead the people in the world below-*Sidh chhapi baithe perb. ti kaunu jagati kau par utara.* If the dialogue is initiated with the intention of giving proper recognition to the other person, the results of such a dialogue would be meaningful and constructive. Sikhism has this tradition and may God bless the Sikhs to learn something from their history and philosophy.

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6. Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1164.
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9. Guru Granth Sahib, p. 441
10. Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1113
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12. Guru Granth Sahib, p. 917
13. Guru Granth Sahib, p. 765-66
14. Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1375-76
15. Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1170
16. Guru Granth Sahib, p. 938

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